

SCRUTINY PANEL A

Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,

on Thursday, 4th July, 2019 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor Melanie Darrington in the Chair;

Councillors Ciaran Brown, Trevor Locke,
Warren Nuttall and Caroline Wilkinson.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Rachel Madden and Lauren Mitchell.

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Theresa Hodgkinson, Mike Joy,
Rachel Newton, Andrea Stone and
Shane Wright.

In Attendance: Councillor John Wilmott.

SA.1 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

SA.2 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7th March, 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

SA.3 Scrutiny Review of Community Engagement

The Chair introduced the item and invited The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services to present the report to the Panel. The Panel were advised that the primary purpose of investigating community engagement was to ensure that an effective mechanism for members of the public to help influence and shape Ashfield in a proactive and meaningful way was provided.

Members outlined that it is important the correct people are consulted with via the most appropriate channels. This ensures that engagement and consultation is representative of the communities we have and demonstrates that views have been considered appropriately in the decision making process. If participants believe that consultation and engagement is nothing more than a tick box exercise, it can disengage residents

In discussing how the Council could actively improve engagement, the Chair outlined a number of suggestions such as, changing the venues in which meetings were held and promoting the use of social media in an attempt to encourage younger members of the community to become involved.

The Health and Wellbeing Team Leader addressed the Panel advising them that a Community Engagement Strategy was in the early stages of development. In producing the document there were a number of key objectives that should be considered:-

- the importance of avoiding a tokenistic approach to consultation;
- creative ways of engagement with appropriate groups;
- targeted liaison to support the inclusion of under represented and hard to reach groups;

The Assistant Director, Place and Wellbeing advised Members that as the development of the strategy was in its infancy, it was a good opportunity for Members to be involved in contributing and steering the project in line with agreed corporate aims and objectives, supported by Lead Officers being actively involved in the development and consideration of this project.

The Chair thanked officers for the information they had provided and asked all Members present to put forward any suggestions they felt would contribute towards strengthening community engagement.

Members discussed that previously adopted practises of holding formal meetings to disseminate information created an arena in which only a limited number of people were comfortable interacting, this in turn could result in a low attendance rate from community groups and residents. Consideration was given to the ways in which community engagement should be undertaken. Particular regard was given to encouraging younger people to actively involve themselves and the Panel felt that they would respond positively with topics involving their immediate area and those which impacted upon their social time.

It had previously been discussed that the one of the most effective methods of engaging with younger people would be digitally, as many of them use social media on a daily basis and this could be used as a platform.

In contrast to this Members were keen to ensure that a diverse range of people were involved in the consultation process and would like other avenues to be investigated in order to ensure the inclusion of older generations who may not be digitally confident.

The Health and Well Being Team Leader advised the Panel of some Place Based Working Schemes that had been piloted in the New Cross, Coxmoor and Broomhill areas of the District.

The ethos behind the schemes was to collaborate with a number of different organisations representing a diverse range of people within the area to highlight the positive amenities available and to build upon them through community involvement. In doing so, promoting pride for local areas and creating a firm network of consultees.

Concerns were raised around the channels of communication between residents, Members and Officers. It was felt that issues raised could be sometimes overlooked during the signposting, referral and response process resulting in loss of confidence for some residents.

This issue often arose when the problem that had been reported fell outside of the remit of the Authority, if this was not followed up once handed over to a third party organisation it could damage the reputation of the Council and reduce confidence in Elected Members dealing with the issue.

The Service Manager, Democratic and Scrutiny Services advised the Panel that Democratic Services involvement in the process was limited to signposting Members to the relevant Officer, subsequently he was unaware of the lack of response that some Members were experiencing beyond initial contact with Officers. The Assistant Director, Place and Wellbeing felt that it would be prudent to include a protocol to address this issue within the engagement strategy framework.

The Chair invited the Portfolio Holder for Regulatory Services, who was in attendance, to address the Panel. In so doing he referred to the previously constituted Area Committees.

A debate took place around this and Members recognised that the former Area Committees did not provide a solid foundation for meaningful consultation due to the lack of diversity and limited number of attendees. However, Members were reminded that they could arrange their own community group meetings outside of those formally constituted by the Authority for their respective areas to feedback on issues which residents felt should be addressed.

RESOLVED that

- a) the information contained within the report be noted;
- b) the Terms of Reference as appended to the report be agreed with the inclusion of an additional indicator of success 'to better involve and inform Members and to include feedback on experiences in order to provide a platform from which to improve' as part of the review methodology;
- c) informal working groups be arranged to progress the review in between formal Scrutiny Panel A meetings;
- d) the Community Engagement Strategy be placed on the forward plan and presented to Cabinet in October for consideration.

The meeting closed at 11.04 am

Chair.